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Rationale for Unit Plan

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My unit plan is over the Harlem Renaissance. This unit plan will cover various authors, poets, singers, and stories from the Harlem Renaissance. Choosing the Harlem Renaissance for my unit plan was really a blessing in disguise. I wasn’t sure what I was going to choose at the beginning of the semester, and I had many different plans in mind that I could have chosen. I chose to do the Harlem Renaissance because I personally know very little about it. When I was taught it in high school, I actually got sick during the week we covered it, and when I came back I had no idea what we were talking about. The Harlem Renaissance is the perfect unit plan for my students right now with all discussion of racism and equality being discussed in our nation. I teach at an inner city school which is predominately African American. This unit plan is designed for students to understand what the text says and how to cite it correctly, and how to debate and discuss serious issues in our society.

There’s so many texts that I used in this unit plan that it would take me over five pages to give my reasons why I chose them for this lesson plan, so I will cover several of the big ones. The first is the novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, by Zora Neale Hurston. This text covers racism around the time of the Harlem Renaissance, and what African Americans had to go through during this time. I chose this text because it will give students an idea of what happened during this time and how far we have come as a nation. This novel covers the themes of racism and defiance, both describe how the Harlem Renaissance. Also, this text was one of the first texts that had an African American woman as the main character. The main character also breaks many female stereotypes from the time as well.

Another text or group of texts I chose is for this unit plan comes from the famous poet Counttee Cullen. A few of the poems we would cover would be Incident, Tableau, and The Shroud of Color. All three of these poems deal with race and injustice that African Americans faced. Also Counttee shows us how he responded to racism through his writing. Counttee Cullen shows us that literature and poetry can give you a voice to argue against an unjust world, and that riots and violence aren’t the answer. This is one of the main reasons why I chose Cullen for this unit plan, to show students that violence isn’t the answer to our problems.

Billie Holliday’s Strange Fruit is another piece of material that I chose for this unit plan. Strange Fruit is a song about lynching in the South. This may be the most important lesson during the unit. It has the most graphic material, and there are actual images of lynching in it. Racism has never been photographed so clearly. I chose her song to show students truly how much we have changed in the last century as a society. Fortunately we no longer have lynching any more, but unless we teach it, history has been known to repeat itself.

As far as the practices of reading, writing, speaking, and listening, I had to really try to make this lesson plan diverse. This year, my CT told me that my class really needed to work on citing strong evidence. My students are getting ready to go into college, so it is crucial to get them ready for big college research papers. The main paper at the end of the unit plan is designed to have students really focus on citing textual evidence. In the unit plan previous to this one, students practiced many times on citing evidence. In the last unit plan we used the standard RL.11-12.1 which says “Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.” Noticing that my students are going to need this skill throughout college, I thought I would use the textual citing again in the final paper in this lesson plan.

Another standard I really wanted to flesh out with my students is their writing. My class’ writing level is a little bit below the average, so my CT and I are trying to improve their writing and spelling. To do this I thought it would be a good idea to use the standards W.11-12.2 d and W. 11-12.2e in use with terms from the Harlem Renaissance. W.11-12.2 d states “Use precise language, domain-specific vocabulary, and techniques such as metaphor, simile, and analogy to manage the complexity of the topic.” W.11-12.2e states “Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing.” Using these two standards to help students with their writing seemed to me to be a great idea. The students’ writing seemed to be better when I encouraged it in my lessons. Writing is going to play a crucial part not only in college but in the rest of their lives. It is important they know how to write.

Since this unit plan discusses civil rights issues, I really wanted my students to debate and discuss civil rights issues in class. More importantly, I want them to listen. It’s one thing to hold an opinion, but I would provide questions and lead class discussions. Students would respond either in groups or voluntarily with what they believed personally. These students are getting ready to enter the real world; needing the ability to hear and understand others’ points of views is crucial if we want to make this world a better place.

I made my unit plan adaptable. You can easily take out certain parts and make it a four week plan if necessary. All you need to do is cut out the video days and the rent party, but I think with such a heavy subject that the Harlem Renaissance provides, a Rent party gives a nice break from it all. This unit plan is heavily installed in the 1920s through 1940s. This unit plan would be great for correlating with history teachers. History teachers could be teaching about the roaring twenties, the great depression, and World War II.

I have used technology in this unit plan. My reasons for doing this is to get students more familiar with technology. The world is changing, and it looks like technology will be at the forefront of this new world. The more my students are familiar with technology, the better their chances of getting a job after high school. I use PowerPoints, videos, animoto, and computers in my unit plan. Power points are great for getting information to my students all at once. I used animoto as a presentation tool and had the students use it too on their projects to help them get a better idea of how presentations can help with public speaking.

This unit plan focuses on how African Americans created art, literature, and poetry in the United States during the Harlem Renaissance. This unit plan is very diverse in that order. This unit plan gives students of all races a chance to see African Americans creating beautiful pieces of literature and art. This really gives African Americans a chance to see where they come from, and how far we as a nation have come as well.

I really want to convey meaning to my students in the texts from this unit plan. In our Smagorinsky text he says “In producing these texts, your students will inevitably demonstrate their knowledge of characters’ names, literary events, and so on. They will do so, however, in service of thinking in complex ways, rather than in low-end level cognitive tasks of memorization.” (Smag 73) I take this to mean that we also must realize that students think differently from us, and that we must realize this if we want to make our lessons more understandable and relatable.

Our Noden text tells us in chapter four to move toward creation with method writing. “Method writing is a technique developed by Colleen Mariah Rae in her book Movies in the Mind, provides another catalyst for helping students move from imitation to creation.” (Noden 90) I don’t want my students to just write what I want them to write. I want them to be themselves; to discover who they are. Noden’s quote summarizes what I want students to receive from my class, a better education and a better understanding of who they are personally.

The Harlem Renaissance is a fantastic unit to cover. It gives the students a chance to see what life was like back in the 1920-1940s and lets them see how we as a nation have changed. Also, all the literature we cover affects us still to this day. These lessons are great for promoting diversity, and making students write, think critically, and most importantly listen.